

Children and Alcohol: A Sobering Thought

Most fifth-grade children in our community are *not* using alcohol, but it is a decision many face. How wisely they choose is up to us.

In one national study, one-third of fourth graders and more than one-half of sixth graders reported having been pressured by friends to drink alcohol. By the time they reach the eighth grade, nearly 50 percent of adolescents have had at least one drink, and over 20 percent report having been “drunk”.

Children and teens in Hawaii need to know how to reject underage alcohol use and how potentially damaging underage drinking is to their health today and tomorrow.

The Lingle/Aiona Administration has joined with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S Department of Health and Human Services, to raise public awareness about the dangers of underage drinking.

As part of a nationwide effort, we will be holding a “Reach Out Now Teach-In” event for fifth-grade and middle school students at various elementary and middle schools across the State.

On behalf of the Administration, I will lead the discussion about why young people should reject underage drinking and how they can resist peer pressure to use alcohol. The participating Hawaii schools are among the hundreds of schools nationwide to hold a Teach-In during the month of April which is Alcohol Awareness Month.

The discussion about the harmful effects of underage drinking cannot stop at the school door. Families exert a great deal of influence on a child’s behavior with regard to alcohol use. In fact, children say that their parents’ disapproval of underage alcohol use is the key reason they choose not to drink.

Talk with you child about alcohol. A clear and consistent message at school and at home that underage alcohol use is dangerous and unacceptable will reinforce a child’s ability to make healthy decisions. For more information about the subject, log onto www.teachin.samhsa.gov or call SAMHSA’s National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-729-6686.

In addition to keeping our children away from alcohol, parents should be aware of a recent Georgetown University study entitled “Clicking With Kids: Alcohol Marketing and Youth on the Internet” which documents how our children are being attracted to alcohol websites which ply them with video games, sexy downloads, and customized e-mail, all of which are designed to sell alcohol.

Please join me in condemning this predatory practice and educating your child on such plots by these deceptive marketers. Please also let these companies know of your strong disagreement with such behavior.

More than 10 million youth between the ages of 12 and 20 drink alcohol. Forty percent of children who start using alcohol before the age of 13 will develop alcohol abuse problems or alcohol dependence at some time in their lives.

In the words of U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, “The benefits from talking to your child about underage drinking can last a lifetime, and make a lifetime last.”

Lieutenant Governor James R. “Duke” Aiona, Jr.